

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At World Development Report 2011 High-Level
Panel Discussion on “Achieving the MDGs: Addressing
Conflict, Fragility and Armed Violence”
United Nations, Monday, September 20, 2010

Excellencies;

Fellow Panelists;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It has been a pleasure to listen to the insightful contributions from my fellow panel members on this most important of topics.

I see my role today as contributing the perspective of one of those countries that has been affected by the turmoil of prolonged conflict.

I want to add a human face to the discussion, to remind ourselves that behind the statistics and indicators we are discussing, there are millions of people who are living daily with the consequences of slow progress towards the MDGs.

I also want to emphasize that just as the problems we are discussing are real, and that the need of today’s event is pressing, with the right resolve and support, we can make progress and make a difference.

While most developing countries were moving towards meeting the MDGs between 1990 and 2003, Liberia was not only heading dramatically backwards, we were also losing the capacity desperately needed to achieve the Goals.

A direct result of that lost decade is that today almost two-thirds of our people live below the poverty line. Indicators on health,

education, access to clean water, food security and infrastructure are all poor. Women, in particular, are vulnerable because of the precarious nature of their employment and because of more limited access to such basic services as health and education.

To tackle this dire situation and have any hope of achieving the MDGs, the first priority of my Government was to establish peace and stability, because a return to violence would inevitably have wiped out any tentative gains we made.

We, in Liberia, are thus eternally grateful for the invaluable help of the UN and the international community – not only for their assistance, but for the way they have worked with us to support the peace-building priorities we identified.

Together, as laid out in our national Poverty Reduction Strategy, we have placed great emphasis on security sector reform, particularly the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Liberia National Police. We also focused on community reconciliation, on the crucial pillars of justice and the rule of law.

These elements are crucial to stability, without which there would be no investment and no jobs; no scope to rebuild our hospitals and schools, fix our roads and reconnect our power supply; no platform for what must be the ultimate guarantor of our development, namely long-term, inclusive economic growth.

The journey will be long. The scars of civil conflict, and the complex, deep-rooted tensions that gave rise to it, will not be easily erased.

Thanks to international cooperation, assistance and investment, we have started that journey and are making progress. We are hopeful of halving the proportion of people that suffer from hunger; eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary

education; reducing by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate; halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, which we have kept under 5 percent; and halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water.

Countries that have experienced, or are still struggling with conflict and instability, are not lost causes.

However, we must recognize that their needs are specific and particularly challenging; that they need more specialized help and consistent, long-term support than more stable nations.

As an international community, we must do all we can to deliver the support that is needed.

If we do not, millions of people, who have already been caught up in the horrors of war, will have to face the misfortune and the injustice of being denied the improvements the world signed up for 10 years ago when it adopted the Millennium Development Goals.

I thank you.